

Sermon: Trust in the Lord
Scripture: Proverbs 3:5
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
Date: September 27th

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and all your soul.
And lean not upon your own understanding
But in all your ways, acknowledge God
And God will direct your paths.

What does it mean on a practical level to trust in the Lord with all your heart and acknowledge God and trust that God will direct your paths? How do we actually practice that? It's really a core question of faith.

Tonight we begin our confirmation class with about fourteen 7th, 8th and 9th graders and I have been grappling over the last few weeks with how I present the Christian understanding of God, life, death, the spiritual quest, Jesus' purpose and everything in just 8 or 9 sessions without being tedious... and to make it even trickier some of these kids have very little, if any, experience of church or Sunday school so very little foundational knowledge of it. But I've enjoyed the challenge in thinking about it. It's a great exercise in getting back to basics and saying "OK, what is the heart of the Christian faith, why is it important and how is it relevant to our lives, to the lives of teenagers in fact. AND how do I approach this so its not cramming abstract religious doctrine and mumbo jumbo down their throats but rather encouraging them to engage in the spiritual quest and offering some Christian tools for that engagement." I'll let you know how it goes.

But one of the core things, the basic affirmations that we will begin with is that the Christian faith proclaims along with Judaism and Islam in particular is that there is a divine presence, call it God, Allah, Yahweh, - which are all merely word symbols – and that this divine presence is not some abstract or impersonal energy force that just is but rather is personal, connected, relational, involved. Not like some big guy up in the sky who we can talk to, but relational nonetheless. Not like controlling our lives and everything that happens in the universe but somehow involved and orchestrating

nonetheless. Not like any THING that exists – more like NO-THING - but is a reality nonetheless.

So there's this divine Presence with a capital "P" we might say and what all the scriptures and all the traditions over the years of Christianity are about is how the human being experiences and responds to this Presence. And often the relationship, among other things, is portrayed as a struggle that goes on between our willfulness and our willingness. The Christian moment is Jesus' words "not my will but your will be done". Are we willing to let go and trusting in something bigger than ourselves – the Presence, God, the Divine - or are we going to willfully decide that its all up to us, what we do and don't do and that we are basically alone in this game called life? Some spiritual traditions emphasize the willingness more than others but it's almost always there, this teaching that there really is something greater than us that we can lean into, trust in, wait upon, be in relationship with and that there in lies the spiritual path towards wholeness, peace, and abundance.

There's a chorus from Psalm 84 that speaks to this as so many of the Psalms do and it goes like this: "Blessed are those whose strength is in You, God, in whose hearts are the highways to Zion (to the kingdom, to heaven, the realm of God). As they go through the valley of Baca (which is a wilderness, a desert) they make it a place of springs." This is the dance the balance where the psalmist is saying by trusting in God, by placing our strength not in human hands nor human might nor our own understanding but in God's presence and light we become instruments of peace and wholeness and abundance. Let me sing this chorus a few times.

C	G	D	C
Blessed are those whose strength is in you			
Em	C	G-D	
In whose heart are the highways to Zion.			
C	G	D/F#	Em
As they go through the Valley of Baca			
C			
They make it			
D			
a place of			
C G			
Springs.			

Human willfulness is not necessarily a bad thing but it is surely a good and beautiful thing when aligned to God, when we are not so much willful as we are willing, willing to allow the flow of God through us. It is a submission to something higher, something deeper than ourselves, some reality that knows with so much greater a knowing, what we needed, what the world needs.

Trust in the Lord and He/She will direct your paths. How do we do it though? How do we practice trust and practice faith? I don't know other than to say – if you've got a decision to make, an issue that you are struggling with in your life, something you need to figure out which way to go, what to do, how to respond, why not lift it up in prayer and await for what comes, notice the signs around you, the voices around you, listen, watch, be patient and wait, and see if some way forward does not open up FOR you, not some way opened up BY you but a way opened FOR you... and then be even more patient. It seems that God's timing is very seldom our timing.

But I also think community and relationships are critical for a practice of trusting in God and watching and waiting for God because often it's the people around us that can notice most clearly how Spirit is at work in our lives, what's being spoken to us in the events of our lives and how we might respond. This is why the soul friend groups that we are starting up can be so valuable for just this purpose to support one another in listening for and recognizing God hand moving in our lives. We need each other to help us remember that God is real and present in our lives and that our work is to be real and present. I like that. Let me say that again: God is real and present in our lives and our work is to be real and present too.

There's a great song by John Mayer, a well-known contemporary folk/rock singer, called the Heart of Life where he says "pain throws your heart to the ground, but Love" – another word symbol that points in the same direction that the word God should point - "turns the whole thing around. No it won't all go the way it should, but I know the heart of life is good." It's not like by trusting in God with all our hearts everything will work out and if its not working out then we aren't trusting faithfully enough. It's not quite that simple. But trusting in God is in large part remembering that the heart of life is good and trusting that things move towards goodness and light if we allow them to and don't gunk up the works with the stuff of our fears...

